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ANTIDOTE

TO

West-Indian Sketches,

DRAWN

FROM AUTHENTIC SOURCES.

No. II.

A SHORT ACCOUNT OF THE AFRICAN INSTITUTION,

AND

REFUTATION OF THE CALUMNIES

OF

The Directors,

By SIR JAMES LEITH.

LONDON:

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CHARING CROSS.

1816.

ANTIDOTE

TO

West Indian Sketches, &c.

IN our last number we exposed the disingenuous attempt of the editor of the "Sketches," to vilify the British West Indian Communities, by falsely applying to them the acts and feelings of foreign colonists; of those foreigners too, whom Mr. Brougham, and Dr. Pinckard himself, (the very author quoted by the editor) represent as infinitely less humane and indulgent to their slaves, than any other nation of Europe. We believe Mr. Stephen's friend is not a little chagrined to find, that a few broad facts have been adduced, to expose his unfounded calumnies, and to prove that his statements, "drawn from authentic sources," are garbled and twisted from their true sense and meaning.

But we assure him, that we have not yet done with his "authentic documents," and that we shall, ere long, establish in the eyes of the world the falsities of this libellous editor, and his worthy employers.

The public must no longer be deceived in regard to the conformation, and system of management of the African Institution. It was founded in 1807, for the express purpose (as declared in its first resolutions) of instructing and civilizing the natives of Africa. A very amiable prince was prevailed upon to become the president of the institution, and many noble and distinguished persons are vice presidents and subscribers. But it must not be imagined that the reports and special reports—the resolutions and *counter resolutions* of this board, proceed from the united judgment, and discretion of those, who form the

principal body of subscribers. Unfortunately for the cause of humanity, they take no part in framing them; their only error is, that they allow the whole affairs of the institution to rest with a small number of directors, who are by no means remarkable for those consistent, temperate, and enlightened views, which should guide an "ostensible" public society. These few individuals avail themselves of their situation, to publish their own principles under the borrowed authority of the whole institution—on subjects too—altogether foreign to the declared objects of its establishment. These principles, being founded in error, tend to foster dangerous and fanatical projects, and to subvert the whole of our West-India establishments. Our object, therefore is, to shew them in their proper light—nor, in a question of such importance as the nature of our colonial system, shall any names, whether of Mr. Wilberforce, Mr. Zachary Macaulay, Mr. Stephen, or Mr. Babington, divert us from establishing the truth.

After many years of great promise and expectation, the subscribers—who had hitherto relied upon the truth of the reports that had been drawn up—began to be much disappointed at finding, that none of the great objects in Africa, the improvement of the natives in religious education, agriculture, and commerce—for which the institution was established—had been carried into effect. It was in vain to persist in deluding them by representations of their progress—it was in vain that the secretary, Mr. Zachary Macaulay, wrote to the governor of

Sierra Leone—with a view to make him *lend himself* to the false and hollow system that was carrying on—desiring that he would make *ostensible communications to government*, “who,” says he, “I have NO DOUBT will be disposed to adopt almost any plan which we may propose to them, with respect to Africa, provided we *will but save them the trouble of thinking*.” Unfortunately the truth *would out*, and it has been too well proved, to admit of doubt, that they have effected little or nothing for the benefit of the colony. Nay—their own chief justice, who was a long while resident there, has declared, that, “the colony of Sierra Leone is in a dreadful state of depravity—that the poor African settlers are in greater poverty and wretchedness, than when they were taken under the care of the institution, and that—the rising generation are more immoral, and dissolute than the inhabitants of any other part of Africa.”

Accordingly, many of the subscribers to the Institution, finding that their money has been thrown away, have withdrawn their names, and we believe the number is still further decreasing.

We should have imagined that this would have been a lesson to the directors—that finding the comparatively small colony of Sierra Leone, beyond their talents of legislation;—seeing, from experience, that it requires practical knowledge, rather than theory to govern mankind—they would have been cautious how they interfered with the far more extensive, and valuable colonies in the West Indies. There we have on the spot, constitutional legislatures and governments, “who,” as Mr. Brougham says in his Colonial Police, “are fully competent to take all the steps that may be necessary, for the improvement of the system, who are intimately acquainted with every minute branch of colonial affairs, and accustomed from their earliest years to meditate on no other subjects, who reside in

the heart of the system for which their plans are to be laid; in short, of whose superior ability to devise, and execute such measures as may conduce to the amelioration of the Colonial policy, we cannot entertain the smallest doubt.”

We should have thought, that, knowing all this, they would at least have proceeded cautiously, if not for the sake of humanity, at least for their own character. So far, however, from doing this, their misrepresentations, and calumny against the governments, of the West India Colonies have all along kept pace with their own mismanagement, and system of delusion in Africa. They have been too successful in eradicating from the minds of the negroes, those principles of subordination, and contentment, which most contribute to their happiness. Their measures have already excited an insurrection in *one* of our islands, and shaken to its roots the whole structure of our Colonial Policy.

Well may their writers, and such men as the editor of the Sketches acknowledge “that they *look forward not only to the progress of African freedom, but to AFRICAN SOVEREIGNTY in the West Indies*, with satisfaction.”

Well may they say, as they do say, “that even now a negro empire is rising in the Charibbean Sea, in fearful strength and energy,” that “King Christophe and President Petion, near neighbours to Jamaica, will shortly address us in a style yet more peremptory than our own.” We give them credit for the sincerity of all their wishes on this head. But the good sense of this country, will not so readily sacrifice the fortunes of thousands of her children, the source of above ten millions sterling of annual revenue, and the immense commercial resources of the colonies—in order to second the visionary schemes of a few enthusiasts—who, under the pretence of high sounding—but hollow—humanity, would

commit every species of injustice upon the opulent, and industrious of their fellow subjects.

But Mr. Stephen says he has perhaps felt "too strong a disposition to spare the colonies."

To spare them indeed! Mr. Stephen must greatly over-rate his own importance;—he must have forgotten his relative situation—and the patronage and hospitality he heretofore received, in one of our smaller islands—to talk of *sparing the West-India Colonies!* We can, however, overlook this little pardonable vanity of authorship;—only, another time, Mr. Stephen will remember, that the colonies want no indulgence—and, least of all—such indulgence as he would give them. It appears also, that the worthy editor of the *Sketches* has the same sort of "strong disposition to spare the colonies" for he endeavors with his characteristic good will, and amiability to work upon the feelings of his readers, by bringing up again the old story of Mr. Huggins's cruelty, to his negroes seven years ago, in the small island of Nevis.

Even admitting for a moment—for the sake of argument—that all he says upon this subject is true, *which from other specimens of his wilful disregard of truth, we are much inclined to doubt*; why is this solitary instance to be made a handle for asserting, that all the West Indies follow his steps!—Why this perversion of facts—and these unjust accusations, against a whole people from the evil conduct of one?

It is that having a dangerous system to recommend, *emancipation to the slaves and ruin to the white inhabitants*;—these would-be legislators endeavor to inflame the public mind, in order to induce it to go hand in hand, with them in their *schemes of liberty, and the RIGHTS OF MAN, to a negro population*, by raking together all their old misrepresentations, which may irritate the unwary, and mislead the ignorant. This case of Mr. Huggins, has long been an offensive

weapon against the colonies; but, being brought forward at this time, and in place of any fresh subject, shews the weakness, and decline of the cause they advocate.

The colonies never deny that in their extensive population, individuals have been found a disgrace to their society. They want no act glossed over—no evil deed extenuated;—they only wish it to be borne in mind, that such things take place in every community. Compare the murders, and acts of cruelty, that are daily committed in England—in the very streets of the metropolis—with the few isolated offences in our British Colonies; and we shall find that the balance will be eminently in their favor. Yet whilst atrocious crimes are taking place in this country, and are passed over without any more prominent notice, than what the law demands, every particular evil in the West Indies, is eagerly hunted out, and fondly dwelt upon, even when the accounts are uncertain, always exaggerated, and often false.

But no! say the African Institution, this case of Mr. Huggins is not the only one! there is another scene of iniquity, that took place in Antigua; one of our oldest and most respectable colonies! We must be allowed to relate it for the edification of our readers; and we claim their particular attention to it, because it affords additional evidence of the *system* of TRUTH, which the African committee is pursuing in regard to colonial affairs;—and of the fitness of that august assembly, to legislate for the West Indies. It proves how intimately acquainted they are (although at a distance of three thousand miles,) with the internal administration of the islands—if not by personal observation, and practical experience—which are nothing in these enlightened times—at least by hearsay, and that grace of knowledge imparted only to the elect.

In the tenth number of their annual reports—so big with promise,

but so meagre in fact—which set out to describe the fancied improvements of Africa, under their benign government, but for lack of intelligence on this subject, end in abuse of the West India Colonies—which still continue to give a certain (as Mr. Macaulay would say) “ostensible” importance to a decaying society, and enable them to expend the money of government, and the subscribers, in order to “*save them the trouble of thinking.*”

In the tenth number of these reports, published in May last, the subjoined statement appeared.

“The Directors are also informed, ~~that~~, about a year ago, the following circumstance took place in the island of Antigua:—

“A gentleman who held the situation of aid-de-camp to the governor, Sir James Leith, having severely cart-whipped a negro woman of his own, who was pregnant, she laid her complaint before the governor, who humanely attended to her story, and dismissed her, with some money for herself, and a note to her owner. Instead, however, of taking his excellency’s interference in good part, the gentleman gave the unfortunate woman an additional number of lashes, and dispatched a note to Sir James Leith, who, in consequence, ordered his secretary to inform the writer, that Sir James had no further occasion for his services.

“On the receipt of this information, the gentleman dressed up one of his negro boys in his own uniform, and mounting him upon an ass, dispatched him with an insolent note to the governor. He was afterwards indicted for cruelty, at the express order of the governor, but the grand jury refused to find the bill.”

Observe the concluding sentence, “but the grand jury refused to find the bill.” Here is not only an accusation of cruelty against an individual of high rank in the colony, but an attack also upon a large body of its most respectable inhabitants; for although the indictment

was made by the express order of the governor, “the grand jury refused to find the bill,” encouraging by their connivance this shocking act of cruelty.

A copy of this report was transmitted to Antigua, and the following is an extract of a letter written on the occasion by one of the most distinguished members of the council of that island.

“I have not time to write as fully as I wish, and intend to do by some early opportunity; but I cannot suffer any opportunity to escape, without a few observations upon the calumny published in the tenth report of the African Institution. I assure you there is not one word of truth in the passage, and I declare the whole and every part of it, to be absolutely false, and without the slightest foundation. The aides-de-camp who were appointed by Sir James Leith on his first arrival, continued to hold their commissions without a single exception, till his departure. He at first appointed seven, and after a few months added one more to the number, and not one was either dismissed by him, or resigned; on the contrary, every one of them continued to enjoy his confidence, and kindness from first to last: no person of any rank, to the best of my recollection, but certainly no one who was or had been an aid-de-camp was indicted for cruelty, by order of Sir James Leith, *nor was any bill of indictment for cruelty ever thrown out by the grand jury of this island, during Sir James’s administration, nor at any other time, since the passing of the melioration act, to the best of my recollection.*”

This was almost immediately followed by an official communication to the agent for the island, conveying a letter, addressed to Sir James Leith by the Honorable Mr. Kerby, one of his excellency’s aides-de-camp, and Sir James’s answer, both of which we submit to the judgment of our readers.

To his Excellency Sir James Leith, &c.

"Antigua, Aug. 1, 1816.

"Sir,—The annexed copy of an extract from the 10th Report of the African Institution, having excited a considerable sensation in the minds of those gentlemen whom your excellency honored with your confidence, by appointing them colonial aides-de-camp on your assuming the government of the Leeward Islands, I am induced, at their earnest request, to trouble your excellency on the present occasion. The calumny (although false) contained in the charge, is of so serious a nature, and so materially affects our characters, as men of principle and humanity, that we deem it necessary to solicit your excellency to enable us to refute it in the most solemn manner. Not being aware of any circumstance that occurred, during your excellency's administration of the government, to awaken your displeasure at the conduct of your colonial aides-de-camp, much less to dismiss any individual for so flagrant an act of cruelty, and contempt of your excellency's humane interference, we most devoutly entreat your excellency to disavow the whole transaction in such a way, that the world may be satisfied how groundless the aspersion is, and how alarmingly open to charges of the most serious nature (conceived in falsehood, and disseminated with malignity,) the inhabitants of this country are, so long as the African Institution are permitted to employ secret emissaries; who care not what malicious misrepresentations they circulate, from the conviction that their names will never be divulged.

"Your excellency's high sense of honor, and regard for reputation, will, I trust, make allowance for the zeal which I have manifested in thus addressing you on this subject, in which I am so deeply interested in common with the rest of the gentlemen who composed your colonial staff in the Island of Antigua.

"I am, Sir, &c.

"T. N. KERBY."

To the Hon. T. N. Kerby, &c.

"Barbadoes, Aug. 11, 1816.

"Sir,—I have received with surprise your letter of the 1st inst. with an extract from the 10th Report of the African Institution, reflecting on the conduct and character of one of the gentlemen who did me the favor to act as my colonial aide-de-camp at Antigua, while I was Captain-General of the Leeward Islands. I hasten to enable you, and my other friends who were my colonial aides-de-camp, to contradict, on my authority, a calumny without a shadow of foundation, by which some malevolent person, or inexcusable dupe, has been the cause of imposing upon the African Institution.

"If to the consciousness which you all feel of being incapable of such conduct as the fabrication alluded to relates, it were necessary to add any thing of my opinion, I am happy in this opportunity of assuring you, that I am convinced, not only of your reprobation of such conduct as is falsely imputed to one of my colonial aides-de-camp, but that you would, as magistrates, have prevented the necessity of my interference, if such impropriety had come to your knowledge as having been committed within your jurisdictions.

"I have the honor to be, &c.

"JAMES LEITH."

So that not only was no act of cruelty committed—not only has no indictment against a white inhabitant for the oppression of a negro, been thrown out by the grand jury since the Amelioration Act, (*a period of seven years*)—but Sir James Leith is happy in the opportunity of assuring us, that he is convinced the magistrates of the island, would have taken the proper measures, for punishing any such offence, without the necessity, of any reference to him. Yes! Sir James Leith knows, that the planters are humane and indulgent; that an instance rarely occurs to the contrary, and that when it does, it is promptly and adequately punished. He knows, and the whole world, will shortly find it out, that the African

Institution, has trifled with the very existence of the Colonies, that it has compromised its own character for consistency and truth.

But how do the Directors endeavor to get out of the scrape, in which they find themselves?

A *special* meeting is called, in order to take into consideration this *unexpected and untoward* arrival of information, derived from "authentic sources." Assembled in awful deliberation, they come to the following Resolutions, which are every way worthy of such an "ostensible" institution.

Resolved—"That it appears from the said letters of the Honorable Thomas Norbury Kerby, and Sir James Leith, (of the authenticity of which the Directors see no reason to doubt,) that the statement referred to *has been contradicted from the highest authority.*"

"That the Directors have strong ground for believing that their *informant was persuaded of the truth of the facts which he reported*, because they have had proof of his veracity, and correctness in former and subsequent cases."

"That the secretary do write to the said correspondent by the first conveyance, requesting that he will immediately transmit the necessary explanations on the subject."

But do the Directors imagine that the public *can be satisfied with such an apology** for their credulous encouragement of every low informer against the Governments of the West Indies, to whom they hold out the certainty of impunity, by avowing, that they will not publish their names.

We hope the Directors will shortly favor the public with those proofs they have had of their correspondent's "veracity and correctness, in former and subsequent cases;" for we should imagine the Colonies do

* Since this was written, the Directors have been obliged to publish a recantation of their calumny—to declare in the face of the world that it was an unfounded imputation. Are, then, our assertions borne out—or are they not?

not wish to be "*spared*" on the occasion; particularly as it would give the Institution, and their correspondent, an opportunity of illustrating, by further examples, *their criterion* of "veracity and correctness."

But can any sensible man believe that it is for the interest of this country to abandon her colonies—to emancipate the slaves—and raise a "negro empire in the Charibean Sea with fearful strength and energy," in order to satisfy such men as the Editor of *West-Indian Sketches*?

The fact is, as an eminent writer upon colonial subjects has truly remarked: "This Institution, which is composed of many persons of rank and talents, has one great defect in its composition, that the time of most of the members is so much engrossed by their various avocations, both public and private, that they have little leisure to devote to the objects for which the society was formed, and therefore are obliged to see with the eyes of others; another, that having no local knowledge of the West Indies, nor of the habits, manners, and characters of its inhabitants, they are ill qualified to judge of the proper line of conduct to be pursued towards them; and thirdly, that some of the members appear occasionally to infuse a greater portion of zeal into the character of their proceedings, than is altogether consistent with sound discretion." But we seriously call upon the subscribers—and upon the public—to mark with reprobation this dangerous system. Its effects are, alas! already too visible. "The young and violent negroes in Jamaica," (as the report from the legislature of that island has declared) are already prepared to fight with the white inhabitants for their freedom; "and the most alarming information has been received of growing insubordination." And let it be remembered, that "the dominion of the whites is founded on opinion. Unsettle those opinions, and the physical force is on the opposite side, and must soon preponderate."

